THE MADRAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

Tuesday, the 8th July 1952.

The House met in the Council Chamber, Fort St. George, at four of the clock, Mr. Chairman (THE HON. DR. P. V. CHERIAN) in the Chair.

I.—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

STARRED QUESTIONS.

Outbreak of fire in the offices of the Co-operative Department.

* 23-A *Q.*—SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR : Will the Hon. the Chief Minister be pleased to make a statement to the House on the fire incident in the offices of the Co-operative Department at Chepauk, Madras, on 5th July 1952 and furnish details of the precautionary steps taken for the storage of propaganda films in the building and the probable loss and damage caused by the fire?

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" On the morning of the 5th July at 10-30 a.m., the clerk working in the Office of the Chief Auditor of the State Trading Scheme, heard the noise of an explosion in an adjoining room belonging to the Co-operative Department. On running into the room, they found flames emanating from one of the steel almirahs in a corner of the room. They immediately telephoned to the Fire Service.

" Seven fire engines under the command of the District Fire Officer arrived at 10-35 hours at the scene. The fire was tackled and brought under control within 30 minutes; it was completely extinguished in another hour. The fire could have been extinguished much earlier, but, it was necessary to save as many of records as possible from water damage. Therefore, as soon as the fire was brought under control, the burning records were handled carefully and the fire was put out with buckets of water. Two hundred and seventy-five reels of unburnt films were recovered from an adjoining room.

" As to the extent of the damage, the four rooms which were affected were inspected soon after and it was found that 177 reels of cinematograph films, office furniture, records, some photographic and electrical equipments were damaged seriously; besides the windows and walls including the electric fittings of the rooms were also damaged seriously. An inspection by an officer from the Public Works Department revealed that the rooms were in a dangerous condition and the area has therefore been cordoned off. There were no casualties and the damage sustained is estimated to be about Rs. 20,000.

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"Preliminary examination shows that the fire was probably caused by the spontaneous combustion of the films stored in the steel almirah. The almirah is stated to have burst when the films stored inside had exploded into flames. There is no reason, so far as we can see now, to suspect any mischief.

"There was no failure or neglect in the storage of the films. It is gathered that the storage method was similar to the methods adopted for the storage of war-propaganda films in the past. The films were kept in separate, air-tight closed metal containers and these were locked up in two fire-proof steel almirahs."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR :—" May I know, Sir, if there are any definite rules regarding the storage of films in Government buildings?"

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" I am not aware if there are any rules but there are certain precautions which are observed and the methods adopted here were exactly the method sadopted after experience with the war propaganda films in the Defence Department. As I said, the films were kept in separate, air-tight closed containers and these were locked up in two fire-proof almirahs."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR :—" May I ask Sir, when the almirahs were purchased and if they were really fire-proof, how did it happen they were damaged by fire?"

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" They were said to be standard fire-proof steel almirahs. I am not able to say when they were purchased but that does not matter because they do not deteriorate. As regards the question how, when they are fire-proof, they were affected by the fire, it is not so absolute as you may infer from the term 'fire-proof'; it is generally proof from outside fire. But here it is a different matter because the fire started from spontaneous combustion of the films inside."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR :—" May I know, Sir, whether the Chief Inspector of Explosives periodically inspects buildings where Government films are kept and whether he certifield the arrangements in this building to be satisfactory?"

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" As I have answered, an enquiry has been made and regarding the rest, we might await further investigation."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR :—" May I ask the Hon. the Chief Minister whether in view of this experience, adequate measures would be taken with regard to the storage of films in the other Departments of Government, namely, the Public Health Department, Agricultural Department, etc., where they have large stocks of propaganda films?"

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" Always misfortune makes us wise. All precautions found necessary will be taken."

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SRI S. B. ADITYAN :—" May I know from the Hon. the Chief Minister whether the films have been insured against damage by fire or any other cause? "

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" I should not venture to answer this question without making an enquiry; I think, no, Sir."

THE HON. SRI C. SUBRAMANIAM :—" Government property is not usually insured."

SRI S. B. ADITYAN :—" I believe there are rules framed by the Corporation of Madras according to which only in buildings certified by the Corporation as fit for storing films, could films be allowed to be stored. May I know whether this building has been certified by the Corporation as a proper building for the storage of films? "

THE HON. SRI C. RAJAGOPALACHARI :—" Rules and practices with reference to Government property are necessarily different from private properties or the properties of Corporations. An insurance company does not insure its own property; there is a point at which we have to stop and the Government is supposed to be the highest insurance institution in the State and there is no meaning in the Government insuring its own property with its citizens. As I said at the outset, I am not sure if it was insured. I am only answering on the basis of a general principle."

Provincialization of municipal hospitals and dispensaries.

* 24 *Q.*—SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR: Will the Hon. the Minister for Health be pleased to state—

(*a*) whether there is any scheme for provincialization of Municipal Hospitals and Dispensaries;

(*b*) whether any such municipal institutions have been taken over by the Government during the last three years; and

(*c*) whether the Vaniyambadi Municipal Council has proposed that the Municipal Hospital be taken over by the Government and whether the proposal has been sanctioned?

THE HON. SRI A. B. SHETTY :—" (*a*) There is a scheme for the gradual taking over by the State of Taluk Headquarters Hospitals, whether local fund or municipal. The scheme was first introduced in the year 1928.

" (*b*) The answer is in the negative.

" (*c*) The municipal council has applied for the provincialization of the hospital but the proposal has not yet been sanctioned."

SRI T. PURUSHOTHAMA MUDALIAR :—" May I know what are the hospitals that are proposed to be taken over by the Government during the current year? "

THE HON. SRI A. B. SHETTY :—" There is a provision to take over three hospitals this year."